

Carol

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Preacher: Chris Roberts

[0 : 00] Tonight, I want to invite you to turn back a couple of pages, just flick back to the second reading from Isaiah 9 which Ethan read for us this evening.

! It's just underneath the old town of Bethlehem. We're going to think about that passage just for a few moments this evening. Giving and receiving gifts can be quite a reveal in time, can't it? If the giver knows you really well, what they choose to give to you can tell you a lot about what they think of you. Maybe you have to try and swallow your pride a bit with some gifts.

And you kind of think, well, what exactly are you trying to say with this gift? If you get the book on dieting, you might think, well, what exactly are you trying to say about my wonderful figure? Or you get loads of deodorant one year, well, what exactly are you trying to say about my wonderful aroma? What exactly are you trying to say? And the gift that God gives us at Christmas is like that.

[1 : 11] By sending Jesus to us, God is saying something. Saying something about us, about who we are, and about what we need.

So Isaiah, Isaiah wrote about 700 or so years before Jesus arrived. Before the gift of Jesus was given. And God revealed to Isaiah all the way back then what this gift was going to do.

And he gives four names for the gift, doesn't he? If you look at verse 6 of Isaiah 9, he calls him those four things. Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. What I want to do with you really briefly this evening is to ask God that question. By giving him to us, by giving this gift to us, what exactly are you trying to say about us?

Why do we need him? I think there are three parts to the answer that Isaiah gives us. The first reason is that the gift of Jesus shows us that we are in darkness.

[2 : 23] We're in darkness. It's what Isaiah says pretty straightforwardly, isn't it, in verse 2. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. But then look at the first name that this gift has.

To us, the Son is given and he will be called, first of all, Wonderful Counselor. Wonderful Counselor. So what is a counselor?

Well, they are someone, aren't they, who gets alongside you and gives you insight sometimes. A person who is able to come along and to help you to see things properly in a way that you've not been able to do on your own.

So Jesus is given to us because we are in darkness and we need someone to counsel us. We need someone to shed light into our situation.

Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor. He's able to do that better than anybody else can. So what exactly are you trying to say, God? The gift he sends tells us that on our own, even with Google, we are no closer to really seeing and really knowing what we need to know as human beings.

[3 : 46] We're no closer without him to knowing ourselves and knowing the God who made us. Even with all of our advantage and our knowledge, we are spiritually blind.

We are in the dark to ourselves and to him. And the fact that we don't see that is a big clue, actually, isn't it? It's in being blind that we're unable to see what we can't see.

So we need a counselor. You need the Wonderful Counselor to shed light on the reality of who God is. And that he is there and he made all things and he made you and I for himself through a relationship.

So the gift of Jesus shows that we're in darkness and he comes to shed light. But secondly, the gift also says something to us, that we are powerless.

We're powerless. And he's the Wonderful Counselor. But look at his second title. It tells us that not only do we lack the light that Jesus brings, but we lack power.

[4 : 58] Because he is called Mighty God. Mighty God. The original word in the Hebrew that Isaiah writes in and speaks in has undertones of a hero.

Heroism. A rescue. Jesus is the heroic God of mighty power. And so he is given not just to show us the way like a torch shows us the way in the darkness.

But he is given to be the way of rescue. A powerful rescue. Isaiah has this lovely picture of his power like a king with the government on his shoulders.

Great, isn't it? You see dads or mums in the park with kids on their shoulders, don't you? And he is like that with the government of all things on his shoulders.

With shoulders strong enough to bear the weight of all the world's ills. Mighty to carry you on his shoulders.

[6 : 10] And so we are powerless. And we often display that, don't we? We display our weakness. Just thinking personally, I know many times I fail often to rule with power and to master my own behaviour.

In holiness and goodness. In a way that God intends me to. Even knowing the right thing, I fail to keep up my own standards.

Let alone God's and his worlds. I'm powerless. And so I need one who is powerful enough to do the things that I'm too weak to do for myself.

And to rescue me from my failures in God's eyes. So what exactly are you trying to say, God?

Sending Jesus to us.

He is saying, you are blind to me. And you are weak. You are unable to do what I require as a holy God, as my creatures in my world.

[7 : 15] Darkness powers. And then lastly, the gift of Jesus shows us that we're homeless. He shows us that we're homeless. His next titles tell us that we don't just lack the light and the power of God, but we lack the love and peace we are supposed to have with God too.

And what else is he? Wonderful counsellor. Mighty God. Everlasting. Father. And Prince of Peace. Now if you know anything about the Bible, you'll know that the Bible teaches us that God is one God in three persons.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But I don't think Isaiah is talking particularly about that here. And just quite simply, he wants us to think about the job of a father.

Father, what a father does. And a father is simply someone who creates family. Who brings others into a family of love and peace.

Into a loving home. And that's the image here. And that's the image here. Jesus is the wise and mighty God who gives orphans a home. The gift tells us then that without Jesus we are blind to God.

[8 : 41] We are powerless to live for him. And as orphans we are outside of his family. And if he comes to bring peace, then that also tells us that we're at war with him.

I don't know if that is a description that you recognise in yourself this evening. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. But God sends Jesus and says to us, actually this is exactly what we are without him.

Without the gift. A famous atheist was once interviewed on national TV. And the interviewer wanted to know what atheism was all about.

And he said, are you an atheist? Because you don't believe in God. And he said, well that is part of it. I don't believe in God. But actually my atheism is more than that.

I hate God. There's no real logic to that, is there? He hates the one he says doesn't exist. And it was a moment, wasn't it, where he lost his guard, kind of intellectually.

[9 : 47] And he revealed actually what is in every heart, truly in every human heart, naturally. That knowing he is there, we live as people in a world that has very little interest in him at all.

A very little vision of him. And little desire or power to live for him in the way that he wants us to. And we live in a world that is perfectly happy to shun him.

And never imagine that we won't be loved by him and welcomed by him into his family. But to believe like that, and to think that, is like me turning up to some random stranger's house on Christmas Day, isn't it?

I've got no relationship with him up until that point. And I welcome myself in and I sit at someone else's table and I start tucking into somebody else's little roast turkey.

And they'd say, well, come on, here, you. I don't know you. You're not in this family. I don't recognise you. Get out.

[10 : 56] And that would be the right thing to do, wouldn't it? It would just be a massive assumption on my heart. If I think that I can be like that with God, then, that is a massive assumption.

And the gifts that he sends me tells me something very different. That we're blind and we're powerless and we're homeless.

We are outside of his family. And that can only change with the giving and accepting of the wonderful counsellor and the mighty God and the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Jesus himself into our lives as our Lord. Jesus is very clear. He says that no one comes to the Father except through me.

So if you think about it, it's not a very flattering gift, is it? At first, it doesn't make us feel good about ourselves.

[12:02] Christmas sentimentality. When you actually look at what Jesus has come to do, go straight out the window. One year after a carol service like this, someone gave me a book called Why Johnny Can't Preach.

Why Ministers are Giving Such Bad Carol Service Servants. And it was definitely needed. But I'm thinking, what exactly are you trying to say with this gift?

And Jesus is like that, isn't he? The incarnation, before we see it as the greatest gift to mankind, we've got to realise, actually, it has the greatest insult to mankind.

It's the kind of gift where we've got to swallow our pride. But he's saying we've got no right to be loved by a God that we've rejected.

And we've got to admit that we need the Lord Jesus to be all of these things. All of the time. For all of us.

[13:06] To admit to him, I have been blind to you, God. And I've been weak in living for you. I've failed. And I've not lived as one of the people of your family.

I've lived most of my life wishing I could be anywhere else, apart from your house and your family. But amazingly, God doesn't sit in heaven disapprovingly in our behaviour.

But in his kindness, he gives the gift of Jesus in a way that helps me to receive him. Because who is this wise, powerful hero?

Who is this awesome light that we need? Well, the shock that Isaiah gives us is in verse 6, if you look there. For to us, a child is born.

To us, a son is given. Even if and when God is insulting us by telling us what we need, he does that in a very gentle way, doesn't he?

[14:20] He sends a gift that is kind and meek. In a God who is a humble child. Making himself poor for us.

And we then are humbled as we see how far that humility in God goes. As he gives his light and power and welcome through his own walk into the darkness and powerlessness and rejection of the cross.

There, the Son of God is treated as an orphan, isn't he? As an outsider that we might be welcomed. He comes to swap places with us. And he shoulders the government of our lives by shouldering a wooden cross up a hill.

He takes the blame we deserve. So, God, what exactly are you trying to say with this gift? God is saying, isn't he, you don't realise how much trouble you're in.

[15:36] Without Jesus, you don't realise how blind you are to yourself and how powerless you are and how foreign you are to me as a holy God.

But at the same time, he is saying, you don't realise how much I love you and how much I desire to bring you home.

He's like the father that is in that story that Jesus tells, the famous story of the prodigal son, who has no shame in running towards his lost boy to welcome the one who spurned him and mistreated him.

That is what God is like, Jesus says. So, can I say it as we finish? Please don't pack this gift away with all the Christmas decorations in a week or two.

Don't just shove it in the attic for another year. And please, please do not make the catastrophic assumption that you are already welcoming God's family without ever needing to trust in Jesus and live for him as your Lord and Saviour.

[16:46] Jesus is very clear that that is impossible and that can never happen without him. But Jesus' gift is here before you tonight.

And God wants you to receive him. So as we close, maybe it would help you to imagine that he is yours to have tonight, personally.

Just imagine the word us here in this passage as the word me. So make it personal.
So instead of to us a child is given, imagine that as to me a child is given. Follow it through. Follow it through. And I will call him my wonderful counsellor.
My mighty God. My everlasting Father. My Prince of Peace. Jesus is all of these things all of the time for me.
[17:57] In my darkness and in my weakness to bring me home to my God and to give me peace.
Let's go out to pray.
Let's go out to pray. Wow.